

What's Our Beef With The Pig?
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Some years ago, around this season of college basketball's March Madness, ESPN followed the University of Tennessee's men's basketball team on and off the court. At the team lunch one day, their Jewish coach Bruce Pearl pointed to a food station as he spoke to the camera. He said: "This is a Jewish dilemma: free bacon!"

Leave it to a Cincinnati guy to talk about the pig. Did you know that my hometown Cincinnati was known as Porkopolis? Cincinnati was the center of pork production until some place called *Chicago* eclipsed it in the mid-1800's. Right around the time Abraham Lincoln was President.

One of the first things people learn about Judaism is that we're not allowed to eat pig. There are many animals Jews aren't allowed to eat, but the pig is singled out to be the worst offender. Why? What's our beef with the hog?

Historically, not eating pig was the first unique sign of Jewish communal identification. Archaeologists have determined that Canaan's non-Jewish neighbors ate pig but not the Israelites. How do historians know this? They discovered pig bones in ancient pagan Canaanite towns, but there is a total absence of pig bones in ancient Israelite towns.

From the very origins of our history, then, the Jewish community has affirmed that the pig is more *traif* than any other animal. Indeed, when a person wants to begin keeping Kosher to some degree, the first step many take is giving up pork.

Today's Torah reading, Shmini, provides a clue as to why the swine is not so fine. Leviticus Chapter 11 defines which animals are permitted to be eaten - Kosher - and which are not. It says that land animals must have both split hooves and chew their cud. Having split hooves is easy to picture: just look for the foot to be divided into two toes. Chewing their cud means that the animal chews and swallows a first time. After partial digestion, the food returns to the mouth for a second round of chewing and swallowing before being fully digested. (I always feel less hungry after thinking about that).

Next the Torah specifies the four animals that are *unkosher* because they possess only one of these two criteria. There are three that chew the cud but don't have split hooves: the camel, rabbit, and rock badger. And there's only one that has split hooves but doesn't chew its cud: the pig.

The simple contextual reading - *Pshat* - doesn't indicate that pig is worse than the camel or anything else, but we know which animal is the real scapegoat in Jewish tradition.

Why is a pig - which is halfway to being Kosher because it has one of the two traits - seem worse than, say, crab, which has neither?

There are numerous answers out there, and they ran the gamut from historical to ecological to health to anthropological and more. I'm most interested in a homiletical response.

The most compelling *Drash* I've found is that of the Kli Yakar, the 16th century Torah commentator. He says that Jews don't eat pig because we do not tolerate hypocrisy.

And the pig stands for a hypocrite.

Recall that the camel, rabbit, and rock badger are traif because they don't have split hooves. Their lack of split hooves is obvious to anybody looking at their feet.

But the pig *has* split hooves. By external appearances alone, we would mistakenly assume that the pig is Kosher. The pig seemingly rubs it in when it lies down by sticking out its split hooves. It's almost as if the pig tries to fool people by saying, "Look at me! I'm Kosher!" But the truth is the pig is traif because it does not chew its cud, which is an *internal* process. The pig is the only animal which from the outside might look Kosher but on the inside is not.

This deception is why the pig is more loathsome than every other animal. It's the pig alone that misleads us into thinking it's worthy of a status when it's not.

Herein is a crucial lesson for all of us: Don't be a hypocrite.

A hypocrite says one thing but does another. A hypocrite projects one image in public but acts otherwise in private. When I think of a hypocrite, I think of Lance Armstrong. Remember him? The elite cyclist survived cancer and then won a staggering seven consecutive Tour de France races. This made him a hero to all and an inspiration to people struggling with cancer. Unfortunately for everybody, his house of cards tumbled down seven years ago when it was proven that he had doped for years. Armstrong is a hypocrite because he projected himself as honest when he in fact lied repeatedly, pervasively, and persuasively for years about his drug habits. In public he played the role of hero, but in private the cyclist villainized and bullied his teammates and critics. People cheat all the time. But Armstrong's fall from grace stung more precisely because we admired him so much.

Here's who we should admire instead: Rabbi Noach Muroff, better known as the Craigslist rabbi.

Six years ago, this young rabbi bought a desk on Craigslist for \$150. The desk wouldn't fit through the door, so he and his wife took it apart. They discovered a shopping bag hidden away. Inside the shopping bag was \$98,000 in cash.

What did he do? He called the original owner and told her. She said that she had obviously forgotten that her inheritance was there. He returned the sum in full the next day.

Muroff said that right away he and his wife knew they had to give it back. He said, "Both my wife and I were raised as Orthodox Jews. We feel strongly that honesty is always the way to go. We're commanded to do so in the Torah. In addition to that, there's the idea of putting yourself in the other person's shoes. How would you feel if you were the one losing the money?"

Obviously, the original owner was most grateful. She wrote a note saying, “Dear Noah, I cannot thank you enough for your honesty and integrity. I do not think there are too many people in the world that would have done what you did by calling me. I do like to believe that there are still good people left in this crazy world we live in. You certainly are one of them.”

I feel that this will happen to each of us. Not finding \$98,000 in cash, for sure. But finding something that really doesn't belong to us. That we'd like to keep. With nobody else aware of whether we take it or return it. Maybe it's extra cash from the ATM. Or a lost wallet, which people generally don't expect to get back. Or even someone else's idea for which you might take credit. It's not difficult to *know* the right thing to do. The challenge is gathering the courage to *do* the right thing, which is not always easy. Torah study and Mitzvot strengthen the ethical muscles that enable us to do the right thing, to be honest through and through, to not be a hypocrite.

The Torah and Talmud provide a model for this ideal. In Exodus, the Torah describes the Mishkan's Aron Kodesh, Holy Ark, as a holder for the Ten Commandments. It says, “*Vtzipita Oto Zahav Tahor MiBayit Umhutz Tzapenu*. You shall cover [the wooden box] with gold inside and out” (Ex. 25:11). That the Ark should be covered with gold on the *outside* is no surprise. Beautiful things should look beautiful. But why use gold on the *inside*, something nobody would see because the Ark remained closed perpetually? Isn't that a waste of gold?

No, says the Talmud. Rava interprets, “Any Torah scholar whose inside is not like his outside (Tocho K'Varo), is not a true Torah scholar” (Yoma 72b). I understand this to mean that the Holy Ark is a model for us. Each of us is an Ark, and ours too should be “Tocho K'Varo.” Our inside should match our outside. We should be honorable in public AND honorable in private. We should talk about doing the right thing AND actually do it. We must not be hypocrites. Our model for ethical living is the Aron Kodesh. The total opposite is the pig.

When we say No to eating pig, we actually say Yes to living honestly, through and through.

Shabbat Shalom.